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ABSTRACT

In his January 17, 1961 farewell address, President Dwight D. Eisenhower warned Americans to be wary of the "military-industrial complex." He called for "an alert and knowledgeable citizenry" which would assure the proper meshing of the military and industrial defense machinery with peaceful methods and goals. Eisenhower's comments reflected his concern both with the dangers of internal ignorance and with those posed by external enemies. While his military experience showed him the need for secrecy, Eisenhower disliked censorship that was intended simply to avoid embarrassment. Although Eisenhower believed that national security, administrative efficiency, and technical complexity justified censorship and his administration established the classifications of "confidential," "secret," and "top secret" which are still in use, the retired general's reputation for openness may have helped delay the push that eventually led to the Freedom of information Act. In his farewell message, Eisenhower failed to explain how an informed citizenry could be fostered and maintained, but his other writings indicate mistrust of both the press and politicians as sources of information. The President's warning regarding the military-industrial threat came so late that it militated against the "alert and knowledgeable citizenry" that he deemed so important. (Twenty-three references are attached.) (SG)

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EISENHOWER'S FAREWELL CALL: ARGUING FOR AN ALERT AND KNOWLEDGEABLE CITIZENRY

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"In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex." With these words, President Dwight D. Eisenhower introduced a new term into the nation's political lexicon, and, although used only once in the speech, it has been repeated countless times in the last two decades, usually with ominous overtones. Seldom is it used today with reference to the full context of the remarks that were delivered by President Eisenhower on January 17, 1961. Read in its entirety, we see that his Farewell Address was not a call for the dismantling of the military-industrial complex, nor even necessarily for its reduction. While he expressed concern over its emergence as a national fact of life, not once in the speech did he deny the need for its existence. He declared that "we have been compelled to create a permanent armaments industry of vast proportions," and although the conjunction of this large armaments industry with an immense military establishment represented something new to the American experience, "We recognize the imperative need for this development" (Eisenhower, 1961, p. 1038). His warning was not against the military-industrial complex itself, but against its acquisition of unwarranted influence and misplaced power that, left unchecked, could endanger our liberties and democratic processes.

It seems reasonable to expect a speaker who dwells on a problem to suggest some sort of solution. After cautioning his audience about the dangers posed by the military-industrial complex, President Eisenhower devoted a single sentence to his proposed remedy:

> Only an alert and knowledgeable citizenry can compel the proper meshing of the huge industrial and military machinery of defense with our peaceful methods and goals, so that security and liberty may prosper together (Eisenhower, 1961, p. 1038).

Over the intervening years, the words "military-industrial complex" have come to be the best remembered of the speech, but the words "alert and knowledgeable citizenry" should be recalled equally well, since they were represented as the solution to the problem.

Eisenhower's Farewell Address did not reflect a last-minute conversion. The thoughts he expressed in it had been on his mind long before his decision to deliver the speech, as has been noted by some of his advisors (including his press secretary, Jim Hagerty, and his brother, Milton S. Eisenhower). Evidence of his concern over the growth of the military-industrial complex can be readily found in the accounts of meetings he presided over during his presidency; having studied all of the available minutes of the National Security Council during the Eisenhower administration, Richard Challener reports that "there was always one constant: the President's recurrent emphasis upon the danger that excessive expenditures for national security would imperil the free economy and eventually produce the 'garrison state'" (Challener, 1986, p. 55). Although Eisenhower expressed this theme publicly as early as his first State of the Union address in 1953 (Maier, 1976, p. xxiii), it was a theme that he stressed even more vigorously in private, as he waged a continual struggle with the Pentagon and its congressional supporters for restraint in defense spending. In April 1958, for example, while arguing against what he felt were duplicative requests for new missile systems, he warned the N.S.C. that too much defense spending "could reduce the United States to being a garrison state or ruin the free economy of the nation" (Henderson, 1988, p. 103). Similarly, he told his Science Advisory Board in May 1959 that the nation could not "carry forward the heavy burdens for armament that we are now supporting. Inevitably we

would have to go to controls in our society, or at the least to bureaucratic domination" (Maier, 1976, p. xxvii).

Students of the Eisenhower presidency have stressed the word "balance" in describing his stance on defense spending (Ewald, 1981, pp. 247-51; Challener, 1986, p. 55). Eisenhower was a tireless advocate of a strong national defense, but he believed that defense spending must strike a balance between meeting the external threat of Communist aggression and the internal need for strong economic and democratic institutions. On January 22, 1952, he wrote in his personal diary that "certain basic truths are being forgotten or ignored in our public life of today," the first being that "a democracy undertakes military preparedness only on a defensive, which means a long-term, basis" (Galambos, 1989, p. 896). As President, he put this conviction into practice by maintaining a "remarkably stable" defense budget that, indeed, showed a slight decline as a percentage of the gross national product (Challener, 1986, p. 70).

Like the "military-industrial complex," the need for "an alert and knowledgeable citizenry" had been on Eisenhower's mind for many years, and it lent itself, too, to concerns for balance. In a speech entitled "Give the Public the Facts," delivered on April 24, 1950, he cited the experiences of World War II to argue that "we will get the best effect in reaching difficult decisions if our public is fully and properly informed (Eisenhower, 1950, p. 484). In a letter written a few months earlier, in connection with his efforts while President of Columbia University to establish the American Assembly, he wrote that he had come out of World War II convinced that America was endangered not only by the external threat of Communism but by the failure of most Americans "to recognize

the dangers of indifference and ignorance" (Galambos, 1984, p. 1305); a "fully and properly informed public," or "an alert and knowledgeable citizenry," would serve to remedy this condition.

Even in a democracy there are limits to what the public is allowed to know, limits that are shaped and stretched by each occupant of the White House. The public is knowledgeable to the extent that government allows it to be knowledgeable, at least with respect to certain issues of national policy, and a balance must be struck between the need for a fully informed public and the need for government secrecy and circumspection. This concern for balance tempered President Eisenhower's efforts to provide for a knowledgeable citizenry, and made him "constantly at pains to analyze not only what policies and actions were needed, but also whether actions should be publicized at all" (Greenstein, 1988, p. 94). He saw censorship as a "stupid and shallow way of approaching the solution to any problem" (Eisenhower, 1950, p. 484), but held at the same time that "the security of the nation and efficient administration" could properly place limits on the release of information (Ferrell, 1981, p. 281).

With respect to national security considerations, Eisenhower's recognition of the need for military secrecy went back to his own experience in the Army. While serving as Supreme Allied Commander in Europe in March 1945, he wrote that "[t]he freest possible flow of news is not only in keeping with our traditions, it is the best way to keep the public informed and working in support of the war effort. The saving of lives and military successes are normally the only sound reasons for interference" (Chandler, 1970, p. 2517). While such military considerations might lead to censorship of the flow of information to the

public, Eisenhower was opposed to censorship if it were intended simply to avoid embarrassment. He was quoted by his wartime aide, Harry Butcher, to the effect that "in the long run it would be better for the news, good or bad, to flow freely. Might just as well let the American public know what the problems are and our success or failure in meeting them" (Butcher, 1946, p. 59). In keeping with his desire to let information flow as freely as possible, he complained on a number of occasions during his presidency when he felt that the Pentagon was overclassifying records or delaying their release. Jim Hagerty's diary, in March 1954, quotes Eisenhower as saying, "When I was Supreme Commander and the Chief of Staff of the Army, I began to fight everyone on my staff to get out and make public all the papers dealing with World War II. If we're still counting as secret anything that happened in World War II, I don't understand it" (Ferrell, 1983, p. 135). On the other hand, Eisenhower was careful to exclude such items as the "invasion plans for Japan, Okinawa, etc., which are still the same type of plans which would be followed out if we were to become involved in a war in China" (Ferrell, 1983, p. 226).

To systematize the withholding of information on national security grounds, Eisenhower issued a directive in 1953 establishing the three levels of "confidential," "secret," and "top secret" that have continued (with some esoteric additions) to the present day. It was also during Eisenhower's presidency that secrecy spread increasingly from strictly military activities to the covert operations of the Central Intelligence Agency, as demonstrated by events ranging from Guatemala in 1954 to the U-2 incident in 1960. Still, the Eisenhower administration managed to

preserve a reputation for openness that probably helped delay the push for a strong Freedom of Information Act until the mid-1960s.

Aside from national security, another rationale for secrecy grew out of President Eisenhower's belief that administrative efficiency can justify the withholding of information. As Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., has noted, "Eisenhower added a new and virtually unlimited category of information which he declared deniable at presidential will: material generated by the internal deliberative processes of government" (Schlesinger, 1973, p. 156). Eisenhower felt no obligation to reveal to Congress or the public anything that transpired behind-the-scenes as policy decisions were debated within the executive branch. As explained by his national security advisor, Robert Cutler, "Until the President has acted, until he has approved a policy recommendation made to him by the National Security Council, nothing has happened" (Cater, 1959, p. 114). The results were far-reaching: between June 1955 and June 1960, "there were at least 44 instances when officials in the executive branch refused information to Congress on the basis of the Eisenhower directive" (Schlesinger, 1973, p. 158); moreover, a precedent was set for later presidents (notably Nixon) to follow.

Eisenhower felt apologetic about neither of the two categories of secrecy cited above. On the day following the Farewell Address, at Eisenhower's final news conference, a reporter suggested that "one liberty, the people's right to know, has suffered under your administration because you have tolerated the abuse of Executive privilege in the Defense Department and other departments and agencies," to which Eisenhower responded simply by acknowledging the right of his critics to criticize. In response to the next question, he said that in

his news conferences, "so far as I have known the facts I have given them responsively to every question, and where I thought the national security was involved, I was honest enough to say so" (Eisenhower, 1961, pp. 421-2).

President Eisenhower identified one more restraint on the free flow of information to the public, apart from the two already mentioned. His conception of this restraint grew out of his belief that some issues are simply too technical for the public to properly decide. In dealing with these issues, release of information would not serve any useful purpose (and Eisenhower never believed in publicity for its own sake). In his "Give the Public the Facts" speech, he asked:

> Can, with the facts, the American public actually make a decision in this particular point? Should they? And I think it is easy to see that if the subject is sufficiently professional or technical, there would be no possibility of a great electorate making a decision anyway and so, therefore, I do not even consider that the security that we apply to those particular and special questions to be censorship (Eisenhower, 1950, p. 484).

Eisenhower's point here is very helpful to our understanding of the importance of "an alert and knowledgeable citizenry." As science and technology played an ever growing role in national defense, it was clear to Eisenhower that the American public faced an increasingly heavy burden of responsibility. If the public lacked the requisite knowledge, more and more of these issues would fall beyond the proper scope of their decision making. Eisenhower had himself faced the necessity of setting up a scientific advisory board in 1957 to help him reach decisions on the multitude of weapons projects being recommended by the Pentagon, a source of expert advice that the average citizen would not have. According to Strong (1987, pp. 261-2), the danger addressed in Eisenhower's Farewell Address

> was not that weapons manufacturers would necessarily corrupt the government and usurp power, but that elected officials and citizens might very well abdicate it. Defense issues in the nuclear age were so technical that they were rapidly escaping the real of effective political discourse.

Shut out of the decision making process through their own incompetence, the citizenry would be helpless to stop the unbridled growth of the military-industrial complex, with dire consequences for our nation's economy and, ultimately, for its democratic way of life.

So brief was Eisenhower's reference to "an alert and knowledgeable citizenry" that his Farewell Address failed to explain how such a citizenry might be fostered and maintained. To answer this question, we must look for clues in Eisenhower's other writings and speeches. One vehicle for informing the public might well be the press, but Eisenhower's private comments indicate that he had serious reservations about its abilities. In a diary entry dated January 18, 1954, he noted

> the extraordinary amount of distortion and gross error that characterizes so much of what appears in the newspapers. For more than twelve years, I have been, in one capacity or another, at spots in the world that have been considered newsworthy. Consequently, I have seen, when they occurred, the actual incidents reported, or I have clearly understood the motives of the individuals written about. Rarely is such writing accurate (Ferrell, 1981, p. 271).

The press, as Eisenhower saw it, is more interested in personalities than facts, yet facts are what the public really needs. As Eisenhower said in February 1960, the most difficult problem in a free nation is "to inform people, so that public opinion rather than being guided by demagogues or by falsehood, or by laziness or ignorance, is based upon the facts of the world, logically interpreted to each" (Eisenhower, 1961, p. 238). That Eisenhower believed the press incapable of logically interpreting the facts with any consistency is reflected in his decision in January 1955 to allow the filming and delayed televising of his news conferences. Ten

months earlier, in the wake of a presidential reply to Senator Joseph McCarthy, Jim Hagerty had written, "That's why I'm glad we released tape of statement to radio, TV, and newsreels. To hell with slanted reporters. We'll go directly to the people who can hear exactly what President said without reading warped and slanted stories" (Ferrell, 1983, p. 25). It was in this spirit that regular television coverage of the news conferences was launched. Eisenhower expressed positive comments about a few journalists from time to time, but it is clear that he had low regard for the press in general.

It is likewise clear that Eisenhower would not entrust to politicians the responsibility for ensuring "an alert and knowledgeable citizenry." After enumerating the important issues facing the nation in 1950, e.g., taxes, foreign affairs, federal aid to education, and so forth, he decried that "[t]oday we hear about these things only from people who want to be elected or who have some other axe to grind" (Galambos, 1984, p. 1307). Of course, Eisenhower saw himself as a public servant rather than as a politician, and the idea that he might educate the public from a nonpartisan perspective had been on his mind as early as 1948 when he assumed the presidency of Columbia University. If there was any public figure who could educate the American public in a responsible fashion, Eisenhower would see himself as that person. Midway through his presidency, Eisenhower wrote an old friend of his fear that

> [s]ome day there is going to be a man sitting in my present chair who has not been raised in the military services and who will have little understanding of where slashes in their estimates can be made with little or no damage. If that should happen while we still have the state of tension that now exists in the world, I shudder to think of what could happen in this country (Ewald, 1981, p. 248).

By the time he delivered his Farewell Address in 1961, his fear had become a reality. He saw no one on the political horizon with the

expertise and the popularity to act, as he had for eight years, as a watchdog over the growing military-industrial complex. He would have to act as watchdog himself one last time, and then entrust "an alert and knowledgeable citizenry" with the role of watchdog for the foreseeable future.

One of the more interesting aspects of the public reaction to the Farewell Address was the extent to which its warning against the military-industrial complex seems to have taken its audience by surprise. As Elmo Richardson put it, "many Americans were surprised to hear a professional military man bracket the military with big business as potential enemies of the national interest. They also wondered why he had not injected that warning earlier into the continuing debate over an 'adequate' defense program" (Richardson, 1979, p. 186). Similarly, William O'Neill (1986, p. 286) quotes New Republic columnist "T.R.B." as expressing the puzzled reaction of many liberals: "He [Eisenhower] had eight years to give this warning; why wait until a minute before midnight?" O'Neill's answer is that the liberals "made no allowance for the educational effect upon Eisenhower of years spent holding the line on defense spending," but that theory doesn't seem to take into account the lengthy history of Eisenhower's convictions on the subject. Thus, the question remains: why didn't Eisenhower speak out much earlier in the way that he did in the Farewell Address?

In his memoirs, Eisenhower wrote of the effects of tremendous peacetime military expenditures, and then explained that the idea of making a final address "seemed to call on me to warn the nation, again, of the danger in these developments" (Eisenhower, 1965, p. 615). His use of the word "again" is somewhat misleading, since his Farewell Address

was not simply a repetition of previous warnings. By speaking of a "military-industrial complex" that could not be trusted to restrain itself, Eisenhower issued a radical challenge to the public's perceptions in a way that he could not have done earlier.

During the eight years he was President, the battle that Eisenhower had waged against defense spending had taken place primarily behind the scenes, and military chiefs who had disagreed with Eisenhower had been expected to express their disagreement privately and to keep their silence in public. According to Elmo Richardson, "if they asserted their opinions publicly, he would order the secretary of defense to reprimand them. In several instances, high-ranking staff officers found it necessary to resign after making public remarks critical of policies discussed by the NSC" (Richardson, 1979, p. 64). Even retired officers were asked to abide by these rules; when an ex-Chief of Staff of the Air Force criticized cuts in the 1954 defense budget, Eisenhower asked him "to come in and express his views privately, rather than going public with them" (Ambrose, 1984, p. 90). As long as this arrangement existed, Eisenhower was able to fight and quite often win battles over defense spending behind the scenes and without publicity, and executive privilege helped keep Congress as well as the public from prying into those battles. It wasn't until 1959, after the 1958 Democratic electoral sweep, that Congress felt like challenging the administration openly, and discovered in open hearings the depth of disagreement between the White House and the Pentagon (Kinnard, 1986, pp. 215-6). Because Eisenhower fought hard for "prior agreement on issues to prevent their becoming matters of public debate," his subordinates "had to undergo some form of loyalty test to convince him of their willingness to support his

policies" (Kinnard, 1986, p. 217), and keeping their silence in public was a sure sign of loyalty.

As a veteran of four decades in the Army, Eisenhower knew that loyalty is a two-way street. As long as he expected his military chiefs to refrain from publicly criticizing him, it would be necessary for him to avoid criticizing them. In what was probably the most famous speech of his first term, delivered in April 1953, he had lamented the crushing military expenditures that kept "humanity hanging from a cross of iron," but he had pointed the finger of blame primarily at the menace of Soviet aggression, and not at all at the propensity of an American military-industrial complex to accumulate money and power (Eisenhower, 1953, p. 419). He had spoken out publicly during his presidency on the need to limit military spending, but he had never publicly indicted those who disagreed with him in the way that he did in his Farewell Address for the simple reason that it was impossible to do so and retain their loyalty. Only when his eight-year battle over military spending was over could he speak as he did on January 17, 1961.

One final question persists: what sort of knowledge does the citizenry need if it is to be an "alert and knowledgeable citizenry"? Eisenhower may have been thinking not of all citizens, but rather of those informed laymen who would act as "opinion leaders." Even then, it is doubtful that he expected them to be conversant with a myriad of details about national policy; as President, he was irritated by reporters "who expect him to know an incredible number of trivial details about unimportant things" (Kistiakowsky, 1976, p. 271). No, a knowledge of the details would not be as important as a broader grasp of the important facts of war, peace, and fiscal responsibility that had been on

Eisenhower's mind for so long. In his revealing diary entry of January 22, 1952, Eisenhower reflected on the conversations he'd had on these matters with James Forrestal (Secretary of the Navy, and later of Defense, in the 1940s), and recalled that "[a]lmost everything that we came to think important could be classed as obvious fact, some so obvious as to be trite" (Galambos, 1989, p. 897). If the public could be made to understand that "excessive expenditures for non-productive items could, in the long run, destroy the American economy," and that the resulting national bankruptcy would mean the end of our democracy, then the public would be, in Eisenhower's view, properly forearmed. His Farewell Address spelled out, in the last moments of his presidency, what it was the public would be forearmed against, i.e., the military-industrial complex, but waiting so long to spell that out was most unfortunate since it militated against the "alert and knowledgeable citizenry" that Eisenhower deemed so important.

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